Jack Anderson's Washington Merry-go-round—With Les Whitten

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WASHINGTON — The Senate Intelligence Committee was unable to pin down any proof that past Presidents authorized the CIA to assassinate foreign leaders.

Top CIA officials, however, have now broken their silence on this subject. They have told us categorically that all the assassination plots had White House approval.

To avoid embarrassing a President, no written record was kept. This provided the Presidents with what the Senate report calls "plausible deniability." But the CIA officials have given us this rundown:

Eisenhower Administration — The late CIA chief Allen Dulles personally consulted President Eisenhower about the plot to poison the Congo's Patrice Lumumba. Dulles had a tendency to talk in circles. He probably used delicate words in discussing the assassination plot.

But he came back and reported to associates that the President had authorized the plot to kill Lumumba.

Kennedy Administration — the late Robert Kennedy, according to our sources, took a personal interest in the effort to eliminate Cuba's Fidel Castro. Kennedy pursued the details down through the lower levels. He had full knowledge of the "executive action plan," as the plot against Castro was known.

Our sources weren't privy to Robert Kennedy's private conversations with his brother, the President. But our sources regard it as highly unlikely that Robert withheld anyting from his brother.

In any event, President Kennedy put Robert in charge of a counterinsurgency committee, called the Special Group, which concentrated on harassing Castro. The President's brother complained about the use of mobsters to kill Castro but approved of the plot, our sources swear.

Johnson Administration — President Johnson, upon being advised of the CIA plots to assassinate foreign leaders, made it clear he didn't want to know about them. There were some activities, he indicated, that the President shouldn't be told about.

Or as one source put it: "Lyndon Johnson was really quite sagacious in staying away from anything that might later blow up in his face."

LBJ, therefore, was not informed personally about the continuing effort to knock off Castro.

Nixon Administration — President Nixon was given an oral briefing on the assassination attempts, a briefing which might have been recorded on the secret White House tapes.

Our sources say Nixon was "gung ho" about covert activities, that he personally ordered CIA chief Richard Helms to foment a coup against Chile's late President Salvador Allende. But Nixon gave no assassination orders.

Clearly, not only the CIA but the White House must be restricted against using murder as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy.

SOVIET HARASSMENT: American tourists have come home from Russia with stories of harassment, apparently because they were Jewish.

U.S. Jewish leaders have told us the mistreatment is still rare, but they fear it could be the beginning of a campaign to discourage Jewish visitors.

For example, a Miami physician, Dr. Joel Sandberg, and his wife, Adele, spent 10 days in Russia earlier this year seeing the sights and visiting Jewish families.

In Kishinev, they spent four evenings with Mark Abramovich, a Soviet Jew who had asked to go to Israel. "We went to Mark's apartment openly," the Sandbergs told our associate Joe Spear. "No officials ever told us not to visit him. We can emphatically state that they said nothing against the Soviet Union."

Yet the Sandbergs, apparently because of their brief association with Abramovich, were grilled for 10 hours. They were accused of being Israeli spies, of smuggling documents, of engaging in "hostile" acts against the Soviet Union.

They were told that they wouldn't be going home for four or five years, that they wouldn't be seeing their three children for a long time. Several times, Adele Sandberg broke down and wept.

In the end, the Sandbergs were packed off to Romania. The local communist paper later portrayed them as Zionist agents and excoriated Abramovich as a man who "slanders the country that had raised him." Such public denunciation often is a prelude to a trial and sentence.

Another Miami couple, Ralph and Miriam Gordon, were taking pictures in Soviet Armenia last September when Ralph suddenly died of a heart attack. The Soviets forcibly injected Miriam with medication, interrogated her for hours and accused her of slipping poison into her husband's vodka martini. She was allowed to return home after several anxious days.

Footnote: The State Department has lodged official protests over the maltreatment of American citizens. Our calls to the Soviet Embassy were not returned.